Christian ministry
European War - 1914-1918 - Religious & moral aspects
27:33

Reprinted from The North American Student for May, 1918.

Recruiting the Ministry in War Time

By Rev. Paul Micou

Collegiate Secretary, Episcopal Board of Education

If there has been need in the past for presenting the ministry to high grade college men what shall we say of the need of the present? A study of the attendance at the theological seminaries in October, 1917, revealed some startling facts. Eight Baptist seminaries have an attendance nineteen per cent less than in 1916-17. Similarly, because of war conditions, four Congregational seminaries show a loss of seventeen per cent of their students; twelve Episcopal seminaries, twenty-three per cent; eight Methodist seminaries, eighteen per cent; and ten Presbyterian seminaries, fourteen per cent.

These facts afford a measure of voluntary war service on the part of theological students. The situation is more serious, however, than these figures reveal. Middlers and seniors who were in the seminaries when the draft law went into effect are exempted from military service. Not so the junior class, most of whom have been placed in Class 1, in the new draft classification. It is quite likely that three-fourths of them will be summoned to service this spring. As long as the war continues it is hardly likely that more than a quarter of the present number of juniors will enter the seminaries each fall.

With a detailed knowledge of the number of men in the different classes of the seminaries it would not be hard to prophesy what the future holds in store. One denomination has done this. The General Board of Religious Education of the Episcopal Church announces that if the war continues until 1919-20 they do not expect more than sixty-four men in all of their twelve seminaries, unless something is done to procure more men for the ministry.

Obviously the churches will face several years in which there will be few seminary graduates ordained. It is vitally important that college men under twenty-one shall have the call of the ministry presented to them, so that if the war ceases before they are called to the service they will be prepared to enter at once on their seminary training and fill the gap which war is creating in the ranks of the ministry.

Of fundamental importance for the presentation of the ministry is the work of the Church in the college community. If its services are attractive and its Christian life normal, it will have a quiet influence in winning men to a proper idea of the pastoral and preaching functions of the ministry. The sympathetic advice and counsel of the college pastor or minister in the college town is often the determining factor.

The presentation of the ministry in the college or university through *interdenominational* channels, would appear from experience most effectively done by an "institute."

By "institute" is meant the gathering in a meeting of those men who are interested in the ministry and who are

of such ability as to be desirable material for the ministry, such a meeting lasting for an afternoon or evening, or from Saturday night to Sunday night. In the former case supper would probably be served to the group. These men are chosen by the entire staff of religious workers, i. e., Association secretaries and college pastors or the ministers of churches in the college community. The invitations are issued personally and the students invited are expected to attend all of the sessions.

There should be more than one speaker at the institute and ample opportunity should be given for the asking of questions and for informal conference. The ministry should be presented from every angle and especially should there be a clear statement of its difficulties and hardships. It is the appeal to the heroic which will win men in these days of supreme sacrifice. Our students must be led to see the unique opportunity of the Church in the days of reconstruction which will follow this war.

Every effort should be made to secure representation on the program, or in the conference, of the important seminaries of the territory in which the college is situated, and of the denominations most numerous among the students.

It should be recognized that this is a matter which vitally concerns the local church representatives. They have been commissioned by their communions to search out men for the ministry. The importance of a joint presentation of the ministry is that it enables them to discharge their responsibilities more effectively because of the secure foundation which an institute affords. Consequently these representatives of the churches must share in the plans for the institute from the very beginning.

An illustration will make clear the importance of hearty coöperation in preparation for the institute. In one state university an institute for the ministry was held which was planned by the entire staff of religious workers, composed of one Association secretary and two student pastors, in consultation with the dean of the only theological seminary in that state. It brought together ministers from six communions and was thus thoroughly interdenominational. From all accounts it was a most successful gathering and it was felt that the ministry had been adequately presented.

In conclusion, we might summarize the advantages of the institute as compared with any other method of presenting the ministry:

It makes sure of an important audience, even though the group may not be large; the ministry is presented from a number of angles—a presentation by one man never tells the whole story; it enables those present to judge the ministry by several personalities rather than by one; there is a fuller opportunity given for questions and discussion than is possible at a brief meeting with a single address; it lays a full and complete foundation on which the church representatives can build, by their own work and by visits from national church leaders; and it brings to the presentation an element of good-fellowship and social contact which is lacking at a larger meeting.

What Church Leaders Have Said Upon This Subject

The facts given above lend much interest to the study conducted in 1916-17 of the need of men for the ministry by Rev. Paul Micou, at that time secretary for Theological Seminaries of the Student Department of the International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Associations. Those addressed by a questionnaire were all professors in theological seminaries, or secretaries of Church Boards of Education. Certain paragraphs from Mr. Micou's report are of special importance.

Need for More Ministers

"It is impossible to make a general statement from the evidence submitted. In some communions the need of more men in the ministry is great, especially if conditions remain as they now are, while in others the requirement is only for enough new ministers each year to care for normal growth. To particularize, the need in certain branches of the Lutheran Church is 'critical'; in the Episcopal Church, great; in the Presbyterian Church there is still need, but the situation is much improved over what it was a few years ago; in the Methodist Churches there are admittedly too many supplies, and better trained men are needed to replace less trained ones; in the Northern Baptist Church it is questioned whether there is need of an increase; in the Southern Baptist there is a 'real shortage'; and the Society of Friends has 'decided need.' There is hardly enough evidence submitted to form conclusions about the following, but it would appear that there are 'probably enough' ministers in the Disciples Church, but that there is need for increase in the Congregational, Reformed, and United Brethren ministries. . . .

Need for Highly Qualified Ministers

"Nearly every correspondent stresses the need for more thoroughly trained and better educated ministers. Quality rather than quantity should be sought for. Some point out the need of specialization in training according to the field of work in view. . . .

"The bearing of these answers on the advisability of a country-wide campaign in the colleges for more ministers seems to be that there should be an intensive search for highly qualified college men, who would undergo the normal training of the seminary with possibly special training for particular fields, rather than a wholesale appeal, with no testing of the men who respond to it until they present themselves as candidates to their church authorities. . . .

Methods of Presenting the Ministry

"Special attention is called to the great value of the Summer Student Conferences and the conferences of the Student Volunteer Unions in effectively presenting the call to the ministry to picked college men. The same is true of conventions of church societies, though college men do not attend these gatherings in great numbers. . . .

"The resolutions of an inter-seminary conference of the San Francisco seminaries, March 2, 1917, are so comprehensive that we quote them in full: 'Be it resolved, That we continue emphasis on the following methods of recruiting for the Christian ministry: (a) The conference method—General Student Conferences, Inter-seminary Conferences, Special Intercollegiate Recruiting Conferences; (b) Addresses in the colleges each year presenting the appeal of the ministry; (c) Holding of local one and two day ministry institutes in the colleges; (d) Encouraging the local college ministry clubs or bands; (e) Much wider use of literature, particularly biographies of great preachers and pamphlet literature setting forth needy fields and personal claims; (f) Following our Lord's mandate to pray for more laborers. And in addition we recommend to all related to the task of recruiting for the ministry and in a special sense the Student Young Men's Christian Association secretaries (g) the wisdom of bringing stu-

dents possessing Christian leadership qualities into intimate touch with able clergymen, each of whom will take personal interest, perhaps showing the student his "study" and his "method" and explaining the joy and service and rewards of the ministry; (h) of inviting influential Christian college men to fellowship dinners where competent leaders may present the claims of the ministry and questions of interest be discussed; (i) and of carefully selected and coached theological seminary students visiting the colleges with a view to interesting students in the ministry.' . . .

College Ministerial Bands

"The majority of the answers to the questionnaire favor the organization of ministerial clubs. Only six out of thirty-six of those who answer the questions condemn them, but they do so very vigorously for the reason that they tend to draw a distinction between those students and their fellows. Eleven favor the organization of ministerial clubs, but qualify their statement by saying that only if they are wisely run are they advisable. Some advocate only a loose association. Some advocate the association together of those who look forward to any altruistic calling, and not the ministry only. If a summary of the opinions can be attempted it would seem that the students should be organized into a band centering around some guiding spirit who might well be a professor; that they should not be too conspicuous in their activity; should not meet too frequently; and should have some interests aside from their consideration of the ministry."

The Latest Study of Ministerial Supply

A careful investigation has been made by the Survey Secretary, B. Warren Brown, of the Council of Church Boards of Education, 19 South La Salle Street, Chicago. It was published in the American College Bulletin, March 9th, and has been reprinted as a pamphlet (15 cents). This exceedingly important investigation should be known to every religious worker among students.